Cambodia Bolsters Mother-to-Child HIV Prevention

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Cambodia is increasingly focusing its HIV/AIDS prevention efforts on children to counteract an increase in mother-to-child HIV transmission in the country, The Phnom Penh Post reports. According to a 2006 UNAIDS report, one third of new infections in the country are linked to mother-to-child transmission of the virus.

Experts say the reason children are becoming HIV positive is because women are not able to access good antenatal care, as mother-to-child HIV transmission can be avoided if the infant is placed on an antiretroviral regimen after birth.

However, Cambodia has about 461,000 live births per year; most happen outside hospitals and health centers; and about 9,700 pregnant women are HIV positive. To prevent women unaware of their HIV status from unknowingly passing on the virus to their children, the government is establishing an HIV testing program for expecting mothers.

The spread of HIV among adult men and women was the focus in previous prevention and treatment programs, but now the government is focusing its efforts on a national registration program for children with HIV to help coordinate treatment, said Teng Kunthy, general secretary of the National AIDS Authority of Cambodia.

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